

PARTNERING WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS TO TRANSFORM MENTAL HEALTH NARRATIVES

Resource Highlight: Youth Mental Health First Aid

[Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) is a certification course that increases awareness of common mental health challenges and diagnoses as well as how to best recognize and respond when youth and young adults become impacted by these conditions. Mental Health First Aid uses the ALGEE acronym to summarize responsive approaches to mental health challenges.



Getting familiar with ALGEE

A

Assess for risk of suicide or harm.

Suicide and non-suicidal self-injury (commonly known as self-harm) are real risks during a mental health crisis. Our interpretation of others' behavior will always be filtered through personal and professional biases. When you see red flags, trust your gut. And, pause to consider how your past experiences, [implicit and explicit biases](#), and expectations impact the way you perceive and respond to behaviors displayed by youth and young adults around you. If a young person makes any reference to death or dying, engage in an open conversation about their thoughts of suicide as soon as possible; if you have limited capacity, consider asking another trusted adult to lean into this conversation with the young person.

L

Listen non-judgmentally.

Listening non-judgmentally to sensitive topics is hard. Like a muscle, the [ability to listen](#) non-judgmentally can be strengthened slowly and over time with consistent practice or training. The importance of effective non-judgmental listening cannot be emphasized enough - far beyond the scope of youth mental health. [Here is an article](#) (audio available) from NPR's Life Kit podcast "Want to listen better? Turn down your thoughts and tune in to others."

G

Give reassurance and information.

Most youth and young adults will have enough insight about what may have triggered an adverse reaction, what has helped in similar situations in the past, and/or what they need in the moment. Consider the different roles you have in relationships with young people and explore what authentic [support](#) looks, [sounds](#), and feels like - and practice!

E

Encourage appropriate professional support.

Did you know [there are over 400 varieties of psychotherapeutic approaches](#)? Each therapist can bring a unique modality that combines their training, focus, and background. It is essential to consider what makes an appropriate therapist, counselor, or mental health professional. Youth and young adults may benefit from receiving encouragement to try out therapy with a specific professional for two or three interactions prior to trying a different therapist or a different modality of care.

The ongoing shortage of mental health providers and accessibility barriers (cost/insurance, waitlists, distance, schedule, bias, cultural alignment, etc.) are difficult to navigate for most adults who are not experiencing a mental health challenge. A meaningful way to encourage appropriate professional support is to be direct, responsive, and transparent about these variables. If you have the capacity, this means calling the insurance company along with the youth to explore their coverage options, drafting an email together, or waiting on hold for the next available representative at your local health clinic.

E

Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

This final guidance from the ALGEE action plan has the potential to be the most transformative in the long term. [Diagnosable mental illness is common](#) (most are not receiving appropriate help or support) and mental health challenges are basically as likely as catching the flu at some point. Each person can develop strategies to notice when they are experiencing peak mental health, declining mental health, actively unwell, or in a process of recovery - there are noticeable parallels between the spectrum of mental and physical wellbeing, and many of us can map what each of these stages looks, sounds, and feels like.

